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8 October 1957

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

SUBJECT: CIA Publicity Policy, and the Problem of the Proposed NBC/CBS
Television Series

1. This memorandum is for information only.
2. The aim of CIA publicity policy is the same as that of any other government agency: to present the aspirations and achievements of the Agency in such a way as to gain public and Congressional approval. Such an effort calls for good relations with publicity media through cooperativeness on the part of the Agency, inviting cooperativeness on the part of the media.
3. CIA is limited with respect to such an aim by:
 - a. Laws which provide that CIA may (exceptions to the usual open dealings required of the Government) and shall (protection of sources and methods) operate in secrecy.
 - b. The exigencies of intelligence work which dictate that secrecy must be always preserved or preservable.
 - c. The fact that CIA has no control whatever over the press or any other publicity medium, so that its principal protection against misuse of information about itself lies in its own refusal to provide information.
 - d. The fact that CIA cannot trust publicity media not to misuse information no matter of what security implications, not because the media are untrustworthy, but because their business is to make public, without exception, whatever they consider to have news or entertainment value.
4. For these reasons, CIA is denied the luxury of fully cooperative relations with publicity media. It must either refuse to cooperate at all,

or must adopt some form of compromise policy.

5. There are serious limitations on a compromise policy in that:

a. The press, the public, and Congress, having been led to believe that the security of "sensitive" agencies like CIA is sacrosanct, are likely to be shocked when they see apparently authorized disclosures about CIA in print.

b. Each such disclosure (invariably believed to have been fostered by CIA whether it has been or not) weakens the faith of the press, public, and Congress in the genuineness of CIA's demands for special treatment in security matters.

c. So far as publicity media are concerned, any disclosure about CIA will be eagerly taken up as a precedent to justify demands for further disclosures.

d. Refusal on CIA's part to recognize such precedents must presuppose vulnerability to accusations of censorship and interference with the freedom of the press.

6. Because CIA cannot be completely cooperative or adopt a compromise policy approximating complete cooperation, CIA will always be forced to adopt non-cooperation as its standard. This absolute standard can then be tempered to a degree, depending upon discretion in individual cases and the wisdom of current situations.

7. Such a policy is now in effect in CIA. It has worked surprisingly well for five years. Under this policy:

a. CIA has no Public Relations Officer or Office: matters having to do with public relations are directed to the office of the Assistant to the Director.

b. Normally, CIA replies to press inquiries with "No comment," whose principal virtue is that it avoids the risk of confirmation through denial.

c. CIA declines to have itself associated publicly with newspaper stories, books, television serials, and the like.

d. CIA will examine certain scripts offered to it and form a judgment as to their implications for the national security; but only on agreement that this service will not be divulged and that no attribution to CIA will be made.

e. CIA gives assistance and guidance to media representatives under selected circumstances approved by the Director.

f. CIA is thus able to keep up satisfactory enough relations with key media representatives to be able to expect favorable treatment in return.

8. To go any further than this -- in particular to go to any length at all in emulating the publicity policies of the FBI and the military services -- would be to risk grave consequences. Principal among these would be:

a. Loss of public confidence in an allegedly "hush-hush" agency which seemed to permit itself to become identified with cheap publicity.

b. Loss of Congressional confidence, with the possibility of Congressional reprisals.

c. Loss of confidence among CIA employees, some of whom may feel offended and betrayed each time they see public mention of matters they have personally striven to protect.

d. Loss of confidence abroad on grounds that an FBI type of publicity-conscious intelligence organization must be too unsophisticated to be taken seriously.

e. Risk of a serious security breach, originating from well-meant release of supposedly "favorable" publicity.

9. The case of the proposed NBC/CBS television series is one in point because:

a. Whether or not CIA allowed the proposed attribution to CIA in these films to be considered official, such an attribution, if it appeared at all, would be so considered.

b. The occasion would be taken by all other television interests and by public relations media in general to constitute sufficient precedent for any new demands on CIA that they chose to make.

c. The successful CIA public relations policy just described might become difficult to maintain.

d. If so, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to prevent CIA from becoming, in the eyes of the press and the public, just another government agency in matters of publicity.

e. All the risks enumerated in paragraph 8 above would then have to be assumed with all the implied possibilities of serious, unfavorable results for CIA.

STANLEY J. GROGAN
Assistant to the Director

cc: DDCI
IG
D/Sec
CI
DD/P
DD/I
Gen Coun